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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001533

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/26/2018

TAGS: PREL MARR MOPS TX

SUBJECT: VISIT OF TRANSCOM COMMANDER GENERAL MCNABB TO TURKMENISTAN

REF: ASHGABAT 1254

Classified By: Charge Richard M. Miles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: General Duncan McNabb, the commander of Transportation Command, visited Ashgabat November 20. The purpose of the visit was to discuss the proposed Northern Distribution Network (also known as NGLOC). As a result of the late arrival and Turkmen schedule changes, most of the planned visits did not occur. The issue was raised with the Minister of Defense, who informed the general that the subject was best discussed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) General Duncan McNabb, the commander of Transportation Command, visited Ashgabat November 20. The purpose of the visit was to discuss the proposed Northern Distribution Network. Although due to arrive the morning of November 20 for a short one-day visit, the delegation's arrival was delayed until 12:15pm. Because of the last minute change, the delegation was unable to meet with President Berdimuhamedov, the Director of Turkmen Civil Aviation, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The only planned meeting that occurred was with the Ministry of Defense.

¶3. (SBU) During the meeting with the Minister of Defense, the Northern Distribution Network was discussed. The Minister informed the General that this issue was best discussed with representatives of Turkmen railways and Customs, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs acting as the intermediary. However, on a more positive note, the Minister stated that "maybe this time or next time" this could be discussed with the relevant ministries and the approval of the President. The Minister also made several remarks wishing the United States success in Afghanistan. He discussed the narcotics problem emanating from Afghanistan and acknowledged that our fight with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban needed to be successful to stem the flow of drugs into Turkmenistan. (NOTE: Most of these remarks repeat previous statements of the Minister. END NOTE.) General McNabb acknowledged that our mutual interest in stability in Afghanistan seemed very clear.

¶4. (C) Despite an attempt to reschedule the meeting with the Foreign Minister, the meeting did not materialize. The delegation had to continue to its next visit in Kazakhstan. The General was therefore unable to raise this issue with the responsible action agencies in Turkmenistan.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had already turned down a proposal for a Northern Distribution Network, the delegation was hopeful that some progress could have been made had the planned meetings taken place. In particular, the delegation wanted to follow up on the non-paper explaining the proposal that a CENTCOM delegation had left with the MFA in September. The message from the Minister of Defense, however, was clearly that the issue is one of political will, not logistics.

¶6. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: How willing the Turkmen are now to permit a Northern Distribution Network transit through their territory is unclear. They are traditionally skittish about anything they fear might cause other countries to call into question Turkmenistan's neutral status. And they prefer to act under UN aegis, if at all possible. Post will follow up with Foreign Minister Meredov in order to find out the current status of Turkmenistan government thinking about the Northern Distribution Network. END COMMENT.

¶7. (U) TRANSCOM has cleared this cable.
MILES